

Vesicular Stomatitis

Animal Health Advisory Alert - 2005

The country's first cases of Vesicular Stomatitis (VS) since 2004 were confirmed on April 27, 2005, in two horses in Grant County, New Mexico, and on May 2, 2005, in a horse in Maricopa County, Arizona.

What is Vesicular Stomatitis VS?

VS is a disease caused by a virus that primarily affects horses, cattle, pigs, and occasionally, sheep, goats and deer. VS causes blisters in the animal's mouth, on the teats or along the hooves, resulting in excessive salivation or oozing sores. These blisters swell and break, leaving raw tissue that is so painful that affected animals generally refuse to eat and drink and show signs of lameness. Severe weight loss usually follows, and in dairy cows, a severe drop in milk production occurs. Affected dairy cattle can appear to be normal and will continue to eat about half of their feed intake.¹

The clinical signs of VS in swine, cattle and other cloven-hooved animals mimic foot and mouth disease (FMD), and lab tests are necessary to distinguish between the two diseases. Unlike FMD, however, VS can affect horses and other equine species. In rare instances, humans can contract VS and develop a flu-like illness that last four to seven days.²

How Does VS Spread?

VS usually has an incubation period of two to eight days, before the infected animal develops blisters that swell and burst, leaving painful sores. After the first case in a herd, the disease may spread from animal to animal or by biting insects. Infected animals also can spread the virus when their saliva or the fluid from ruptured blisters contaminates feed, water or hay shared with herd mates. Sick animals should be isolated and may need supportive care to prevent a secondary infection where blisters have broken. Immediate diagnosis is critical for preventing the spread of VS. Therefore, it is important for veterinary practitioners to work closely with livestock producers and horse owners moving animals to and from infected regions.

Quarantine Information

In most States, if VS is confirmed, infected animals are quarantined for 30 days after all lesions are healed, and the animals are re-inspected by a state or federal regulatory veterinarian. This short-term quarantine helps prevent the movement of animals and the spread of the disease to other premises, fairs, markets or to other states.²

California Import Restrictions

California import requirements specify that all horses, cattle, and swine originating from any state where vesicular stomatitis (VS) has been diagnosed since April 2005, (except cattle and swine transported directly to slaughter) must be accompanied by a health certificate (certificate of veterinary inspection) and signed by an accredited veterinarian that includes the following statement:

"The animals represented on this health certificate of veterinary inspection have not originated from a premises or area under quarantine for vesicular stomatitis (VS) or a premises on which VS has been diagnosed in the past 30 days. I have examined the animals and have found no signs of VS."

California Racing Board Requirements

The California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) requires all horses coming from states affected with VS, must have a negative VS test within the past thirty (30) days to enter race tracks and or CHRB approved training centers. Please contact Dr. Ron Jensen, Equine Medical Director, CHRB, at (916) 263-6000 or by FAX at (916) 263-6042 for further information.

Preventing VS

VS occurs sporadically in the U.S., usually in southwestern states. Although VS has not been recently found in California, the state's livestock industries were seriously affected during the 1982 outbreak when the disease was introduced into Central Valley dairies by shipments of replacement animals from other western states. Thus, animals imported from potentially affected areas pose a high risk and should be closely monitored. Any suspicious animals should be immediately isolated and examined by state or federal veterinarian.

Report VS

Prevent spread of VS on your ranch as well as your neighbor's ranch. Call your veterinary practitioner or the CDFA (See contact information below) if your livestock develop blisters, sores, erosions or excessive salivation. Additional information is available from the Animal Health Branch of the California Department of Food and Agriculture at the following numbers:

Sacramento Headquarter (916) 654-1447 • Redding District (530) 225-2140 • Modesto District (209) 491-9350 • Tulare District (559) 685-3500 • Ontario District (909) 947 4462

¹ United States Department of Food and Agriculture

² Texas Animal Health Commission